Maomao, mystery, and the intriguing Blue Angel mushroom

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Maomao, mystery, and the intriguing Blue Angel mushroom

by lefemmerouge

Summary

One day, Maomao finds some glowing fungi in a part of the Rear Palace. She has long dealt with mushrooms but these are different... somehow. After she finds a note written in a language she has never seen before, and she becomes curious. She quickly runs away and tests them out, as she usually does, which ends up changing her life. What she would never expect is that these Blue Angels are fungi that will turn her life upside down as they threaten to upend the entire palace.

Notes

Hello everyone! This is my first-ever fic for The Apothecary Diaries and it *mainly* centers on characters for that, with Common Side Effects characters primarily mentioned, rather than shown directly, so you don't need familiarity with that fandom. The primary reason I went with this crossover was to bring in the magic mushroom. It really too bad that there are so few Common Side Effects fics. That lack of fics somewhat inspired me to write this fic. I waited until the artbook for The Apothecary Diaries series arrived so I could add additional details and get motivation to finish this fic. Unfortunately the artbook, while containing many illustrations which would only previously be seen in Japan, was not what I expected. As such, I had to come up with my own motivation. Even so, the book was helpful with descriptions in some scenes. I hope you all enjoy this fic!

Comments are welcome and appreciated.

This fic has been cross-posted to Squidge World, Wattpad, and Quotev.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Blue Angels Fly High: Marshall's Selfless Act, Rei's Surprise, Nanako's Joy, Little Grey Men, and... Everlasting Love? by lefemmerouge
- Inspired by Hallucinogenic Plants (New York: Golden Press, 1976) by Richard Evans Shultes
- Inspired by Common Side Effects Finally Reveals The Formula to Growing Blue Angel Mushrooms (And It’s Disgusting) by Marco Vito Oddo
- Inspired by 'Common Side Effects': Adult Swim’s Conspiracy Thriller Tackles Magic Mushrooms and Big Pharma by Bill Desowitz
- Inspired by Common Side Effects Resonates With the World, and I Hate It for That by Melissa Sarnowski

- Inspired by 'Common Side Effects' Review: Adult Swim’s Animated Conspiracy Thriller About Big Pharma Is a Whole Vibe by Angie Han
- Inspired by Adult Swim’s Common Side Effects Defiantly Critiques the Medical-Industrial Complex by Joshua Harris
- Inspired by Are Blue Angel Mushrooms Real? Or Can They Be? by Mysterious Admin
- Inspired by Types of Magic Mushrooms by Sunshine Behavioral Health
- Inspired by Psilocybe Azurescens: This Magic Mushroom is Stronger than What You're Used To by Caine Barlow
- Inspired by Psychedelic Mushroom Strains by Potency: 30 Popular Varieties by Erika Perez
- Inspired by Injury-Triggered Blueing Reactions of Psilocybe "Magic" Mushrooms by Claudius Lenz, Jonas Wick, Daniel Braga, María García-Altares, Gerald Lackner, Christian Hertweck, Markus Gressler, Dirk Hoffmeister

Fungi had always fascinated Maomao. She'd seen these organisms growing near the northern quarter of the Rear Palace on top of a dead body, where they thrived, as did insects and other plants, especially in the areas which were abandoned. She had found some fungi which glowed in the night, looking like oyster mushrooms, but were *actually* poisonous. Later she accepted a request to keep track of these organisms and remove them from the inner court. In the process, she had shown Jinshi and Gaoshun what fungi could do to you, and learned how one consort used them as a weapon against another. She also helped uncover the mystery in a winery, deducing that patients had become very drunk, as they consumed wine and a soup with mushrooms in it, stopping the body from metabolizing the alcohol as it was supposed to.

She had gained tolerance for many poisons, through her many experiments, on her own body, including snake bikes, aphrodisiacs, and hallucinogenic fungi, while at the Verdigris House, a high-class brothel within the pleasure district. The latter would come in handy when it came to these unusual fungi which she happened to come across. They looked unusual. The cap of each one glowed florescent blue, as did the gills underneath, and the stem. Maomao was more than aware that the spores could go into the air, so the air would distribute them. These organisms served as the reproductive section of fungus, although some did not know that.

These fungi made her curious because they were blue and glowing. Some kinds of fungi became light or dark blue when they were cut or bruised. That did not seem to be the case with these fungi. She looked on the ground and saw a note written in a weird language, saying: "these are Blue Angel mushrooms. Make sure to care for them correctly and get yourself a tortoise. They can heal any injury." She saw this message and had no idea what it meant. What language was this even in? The letters were unrecognizable, although she knew of concepts with different words. The only things she could make out were: "Blue Angels" and "tortoise."

Looking one way and another, to make sure *no one* saw her, she picked up a few Blue Angels, and stuffed them into her pocket. She scurried back to her room in the Inner Palace, where she served as a lady-in-waiting, in the Jade Pavilion, for Gyokuyō. At the same time, she served as the apprentice physician in the outer court, a servant-of-sorts to Jinshi, and a poison tester. All these skills were enhanced by her knowledge as an apothecary.

Work for the day was slow, so nothing stopped her from returning to her living quarters. What she didn't know was that these fungi only grew thanks to tortoise feces, creating a constraint on how many could grow, and serving as part of their lifecycle. It was said they could heal any injury or illness. The idea was that no one had to suffer from health issues ever again. These organisms, like all mycelium, were connected together, although was unclear *how*. If Marshall had been there to talk to her, he probably would have told her that they were still being studied. The fact that these fungi had come there at all was *accidental.* It was part of a time and space warp which had been created when he had gone on a trip after having one, and somehow he'd arrived there. He had brought the fungi to many locations. She was just one recipient. After all, he had saved that woman in Japan before, after she had fallen off a bridge and almost died, so he was *confident* in his ability to help others. What he

didn't count on was the unintended consequences. He was meddling in something he didn't completely understand. That was always a dangerous thing to do.

The Blue Angels had miraculous properties, so much that Frances wanted to market them for a pharmaceutical company. She would later realize this was foolish. At the time, she thought it was the right way to make them available to people. This was a clash between one person, Marshall, who focused on healing, and another person, Frances, focused on profit and career advancement.

Maomao knew none of this. She came inside her room, which had been set aside for her, and laid down on her bed. No one came in to bother her. The sun began to set. She still did not know what the note said. Even so, she recognized some symbols on the back. A tortoise... and defecation? She was unsure what it meant. Like anything else, she *wanted*, no she *needed* to test these mushrooms. She popped one in her mouth.

As soon as the fungi began to crumble into nothing, she could feel herself pulled into some bizarre other world. She saw these white, tiny, and somewhat humanoid, figures. She wasn't sure if it was all real, or she was just imagining all of it. Was this a hallucination? Or something else entirely? She did not know. This seemed to be one *powerful* magic mushroom. People said these organisms were psychoactive, that they led to powerful changes in one's senses or mind. That was possible even if you took a small dose. That included visual distortions, perceiving color more intensely than usual, or distortion of time itself. For her, this was a moving experience.

In no time at all, she came back to reality. She wasn't sure exactly what had happened or why she felt this way. What even was this *strange species* of fungi? It wasn't a beautifully blue (but mostly decorative) *entoloma hochstetteri* nor the psychoactive *psilcybe*, nor was the the immune-boosting and anti-inflammatory *ganoderma lucidum.* She had no idea what this mushroom was or why it was growing in the Rear Palace.

After that, she laid down to sleep as the sun finally went below the horizon. There wasn't anything else to do and no one else to talk to. She quickly began to sleep. She could deal with all of these issues tomorrow.

The next morning, the sunlight came through her room's window shades, illuminating her dark green hair, which had a blackish sheen to it, as it did every day. As she yawned, she felt a little out of sorts. Her world was spinning. She began struggling to keep track of what was going on around her. She wasn't necessarily out of her depth, nor was she totally losing focus. She quickly shook her head and regained her composure. She wasn't sure what all of this was or why she was experiencing it. She had to move on with the rest of her day.

She knew that telling Jinshi about these mushrooms would be disastrous. She had to know her place. This time she wouldn't be so lucky. She saw Jinshi, with his usual servant Gaoshun, standing beside him. They walked in an almost regal demeanor. Although he called himself a eunuch, she very much doubted this claim after she had touched his *frog* before, or at least she called *it* that. He pulled her aside as he often did.

"Apothecary, can you come into my office for a second? I have need of your services." His smile caused girls around him to be entranced. She wasn't like them. She didn't fall for his

charms. Like always, she had no choice but to comply with his request. It was the order of things in the palace. You had to accede to commands, even if you did not like them, or the person giving them sometimes acted *a bit* like a playboy.

She nodded in reply, then followed him and Gaoshun inside. She closed the doors behind him and he quickly drew the shades. "What may I do for you, Master Jinshi? Your wish is my command."

He suddenly pulled a bluish sparkling fungi out of his pocket. It was glowing, almost creating its own light source. She knew exactly what it was. She feigned ignorance. She *could not*, under any circumstances, tell him what she knew.

"One of my servants found this in the health clinic, which we had under close watch after what happened recently. The physician gave this to us before she collapsed. Can you identify it?"

Maomao clasped her hands and bowed. She tried to remain gracious and hide her glee over getting this assignment. She couldn't reveal her reveal true feelings about this or he would take this away from her.

"I will do as you ordered, master." After saying this and bidding him farewell, she proceeded to walk toward the clinic quickly. Even though it was a remote possibility, she had to make sure he did not stop her. After she left, Jinshi was a bit relieved. He began speaking to Gaoshun about his worries, guessing what *damage* this substance could cause if it spread across the palace, or even the country.

"This glowing...fungi...supposedly heals everyone's injuries...then you start to see hallucinations. Maybe I should *just try it* myself and see..."

Gaoshun moved his head from side to side. He couldn't let this happen. Jinshi had to protect himself. He had a mission to do as a fake eunuch. He did it on behalf of the emperor, you could say.

"Sir, that's not a good idea. Let her investigate into this. Having someone like you go through that would be *bad*."

Jinshi understood what he was saying and agreed. He had expected Gaoshun would deny him this and he relented. However, he did want to try one *some time*, without Gaoshun stopping him.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Rear Palace, Maomao had finally reached the clinic. Servants were rushing in and out. Shenlu was gone. Instead her replacement, who also did not have much medical knowledge, was running the clinic. She was trying to manage it the best she could, with the help of those assisting her.

"Apothecary, I'm glad you are here. Can you help? This is *a crisis*." Maomao would have preferred to come across someone who knew her *before* and someone who addressed her by *her name*, rather than her title. She had little choice. This was how the palace was sometimes. You had to know your place. You couldn't step out of line.

Maomao nodded in response. She soon grabbed a mask and apron from the nearby wall. She made her way to an area where some patients who were lying on beds and groaning. They were saying strange things, either claiming that the walls were oozing, coming down like rain, that the room was swaying, or that they were seeing small grey men walking around. Many of their pupils were dilated. Some were utterly terrified and others were in a sense of bliss.

She knew better than anyone that some kinds of of mushrooms are stronger than others. They could induce highly visual, intense, and possibly *hyperdimensional* effects, even creating a sense of paralysis. It could last as long as twenty-four hours. For those who weren't prepared, it could lead to a lot of anxiety. That wouldn't happen to her.

She used all her apothecary skills to care for the patients and did what she could to help, through the entire day. It was utterly exhausting. As the day came to a close and the amount of patients dropped to a trickle, the physician thanked her. She then told her about everything she had seen earlier and requested that Maomao get additional help. She couldn't agree more. If this spread across the palace, it would cause utter mayhem. Undoubtedly it would be shared outside the palace walls, far beyond the pleasure district. The *whole country* could fall because of this. She now saw why this would be a big deal. She rushed back to Jinshi, wanting him to have the news before the day ended.

What Maomao didn't know is that she came in at the wrong time. She opened the door so quickly that Jinshi accidentally swallowed a mushroom. This could be *very very* bad. She tried to step away. He moved behind her and held her with his arm. It was strong and she couldn't escape. He didn't want to hurt her. Instead, he wanted to make sure she couldn't leave his grasp. Even, such behavior was unacceptable for any man to engage in, against a woman (or any other person), and if it went on, it would be an unacceptable invasion of her personal space. His pupils became dilated and he could see color much more intensely than usual. He quickly turned her around. She put her arms in front of her, crossing them in an x, trying to prevent him from touching her. She was utterly bewildered and did not know what to do.

"Your eyes are such a beautiful blue. I've never seen them this close. There are so many things I've wanted to do to you...now I will get the chance..."'

Maomao grimaced. What could she possibly do in this situation? She had to figure out some way to flee. Apart from holding her with his arm, he hadn't touched her face. That was undoubtedly what he would do next. At that very moment, Gaoshun came in and saw her. Thanks to his intervention, she scampered to another part of the room, but not before he fell to the ground and started crying. Neither one of them did anything while he made a shameful display of himself.

"Why will *no one* care about me? I've gone through so much. I can't hold it all back...maybe these little grey creatures will help me achieve what I always wanted..." After saying this, he slumped onto the floor.

As he laid on the floor, Gaoshun and Maomao stared at him for a while. Eventually, they decided to help him get up, so they could bring him back to his room. Maomao usually would not be given this task, but this was an emergency. They worked together to carry him onto his bed, and left his chambers, where he slept soundly. Gaoshun directed her outside. She would

rather follow him than stay with Jinshi who was acting in an unusual manner. She could guess why.

Gaoshun couldn't let anyone else know what had just happened. So, he walked with Maomao back to where she was staying, where they could talk in private, without anyone overhearing. This had rarely happened while she had been employed within the palace, so she found it odd. She went along with it. What choice did she have in the matter?

"You can't tell *anyone* what happened tonight. Mr. Jinshi was...not acting appropriately. I take full responsibility..."

Maomao cut him off. It wasn't his fault, not at all. She decided to come clean.

"No, you have no blame in this. It was all Master Jinshi. He's the one who took it. He swallowed it. I just happened to be there for it." She sighed and then added. "I took one myself yesterday and...well..." She showed off her arm, unwrapping her bandages. There were no blemishes, cuts, or bruises, as there had been before. Gaoshun was astonished.

"Why didn't you tell the master about it?" he asked. He knew how she might respond. He had to ask anyway. He wanted them both to be on good terms, even if they clashed with one another.

"Master Jinshi would...say I was foolish, that I shouldn't hurt myself." She stopped herself as her eyes opened even wider, as she held up one of the mushrooms. She marveled at it. "I want to experiment...no matter what happens to me...I want to learn more...even it messes me up...it is all worth it in the end."

While Gaoshun still did not completely understood why she would hurt herself through these dangerous experiments, he did understand *why* she had come to see Jinshi. She had finished her time at the clinic, had she not?

"So, what did you find at the clinic today?...anything of note?"

She shrugged and explained what she saw. Many patients, who had enlarged pupils, were experiencing visual hallucinations. Their hearing, touch, smell, or taste, or even some of these senses at the same time, were heightened. Some were trembling, twitching, had numb limbs, or convulsions. Others were completely happy, violent before beginning a deep sleep, heard voices and echoes, or were laughing. Most of them couldn't concentrate on what she was saying and appeared to be isolated from everything around them. They had become indifferent, with their dream-like state appearing, to them, as reality. She handed him a note she had found the previous day.

"It was by some of these fungi. This note calls them 'Blue Angels'... and had something to do with a tortoise. Everything else makes *no sense* to me." Gaoshun scratched his head. He bowed, took her note, and promised to look into it. He would go to the palace archives to see if there was *anything* about these fungi. He bid her good night and told her to get some sleep.

After he left, she could see that no one else was present. She dug in her pocket and held another mushroom in her hand. She knew more than anyone that the exact dosage determines

the substance's impact. This was as much true with fungi with certain properties as it was with other drugs. The active components differ, whether someone eats the cap or the stem. She had consumed various psychedelic mushrooms before, whether in small amounts, often called a microdose, which had led to extreme laughter, happiness, euphoria, and hallucinations. These Blue Angels were different. They had a sense of beauty to them unlike anything she had ever seen before.

If she had just taken off a small piece, equivalent to 0.2-0.4 grams of a dried mushroom, in a microdose, her creativity and energy could have been boosted, without any visible changes, loss of control, or visual images. She could have even chewed a bigger chunk, allowing her to feel like she was floating on clouds, known as a light dose (0.5-1 grams). At the same time, she could have opened herself to having good vibes, deep conversations, laughs, and a high across her body. But who would she have deep conversations with? Some called that a common dose, or 1 to 2 grams. She could have experienced, thought, and felt new things, taking away powerful insights in the process. With such a strong dose, equivalent of 2.5 to 5 grams, she could have had a mix of more control and *less* control. Many people went with the latter dosage, the *classic* definition of how some defined a trip when using psychedelics.

Finally, there was a heavy dose, of over 5 grams. Those that did this wanted an experience beyond a classic trip, to connect with the universe while not using it as a form of escape. It would be an addition, an enhancement of one's life. There weren't any so-called "psychonauts" in this day and place, so she had to figure it out herself. And she did, even experiencing some bad trips in the past. She popped the entire fungi into her mouth and swallowed it, the equivalent of a heavy dose. She returned to the area she had been before. She wasn't fully aware of this substance's power, allowing her to connect with people in the real world, either by sending them messages or touching them. Although eating too many of these fungi was toxic to such an extent that you would end up suffering in another world, or what could be called a plane of existence, she had enough self-control to only experiment with *one* at a time.

What she saw surprised her. She had a vision of people and events from *her past*. While this could include those who are dead, this time she saw her *mother*, Fengxian, in her early years, who was playing a game of Xiangqi. Emotion washed over her. She saw herself coming apart into pieces as some weird creatures waved back at her. She came back to reality in an instant. She wasn't sure what had happened. Even so, she wanted to keep consuming these *Blue Angels* every day, so she could learn more about this portal world. What did not know, then, is that these fungi would turn the palace on its head, as they threatened the existing order in more ways than one.

End Notes

I've been working on this fic for a while, off-and-on since April 5th, at least. I even had to resave a draft of this, after the fic was scheduled for deletion (as a draft) on May 4th, with the title "Maomao and the mysterious Blue Angel mushroom". Originally I planned to publish this on the day of the the Global Marijuana March (GMM), also known as the Million Marijuana March (MMM), which is held at places across the world on the first Saturday in May, and is a notable cannabis culture event. Although the latter day is relevant even though this fic is about psychedelic mushrooms, rather than pot, and the fic is drug-related enough to publish that day, I had not finished the fic by then.

For this fic, I used information from the Kusuriya fandom pages "Corpse Fungus", "Maomao", "Rear Palace", "Manga Volume 09", "Manga Chapter 059", "Light Novel Volume 03", and "Light Novel Volume 12". There's also a chapter in the seventh light novel named "Mushroom Congee". I have not read it, and I'm not sure what it is about. I know there is a mini-anime episode, aired on January 27, 2025, about mushrooms, entitled "Mushroom", as well. Similarly, I'm not sure what that is about. I even used a quote from a fic that seems to be gone, which is a weird experience to say the least. I did some research on the impacts of hallucinogenic mushrooms to add more context, plus other notes I used for the fic "Blue Angels Fly High" that I cited as an inspiration for this fic. It is worth noting that the TV Tropes page entitled "Magic Mushroom" notes psychadelic mushrooms in One Piece, Ranma 1/2, Fantasia (there's a mushroom dance), Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (the Caterpillar's mushroom), and Inside Job (the character Myc Cellium is, as the page describes, "a sentient, walking Psilocybin mushroom who secretes hallucinogenic ooze."). I was surprised you could even order some of these mushrooms online, which was used as an inspiration as well. This fic comes at a good time, as a new digital collection which "preserves key books on drug use and policy" was just announced at the Internet Archive! I may use their resources for fics in the future.

The one site I read (one of those listed in the inspirations section), said that hallucinogenic mushrooms with psilocybin or psilocin can cause "sensory alterations and alterations in mental states" but the main effects are "intensified perception of color[,] closed eye visions [,] visual distortions (open eye)[,] GI distress [,] anxiety [,] pupil dilation [,] emotional sensitivity [,] time distortions [,] euphoria [,] and panic." It added that all "hallucinogenic substances carry a risk of adverse psychological effects...even those without mental disorders can have psychiatric emergencies such as extreme agitation, panic, terror, persisting psychosis and behavior harmful to self or others when using hallucinogenic mushrooms." The latter causes issues including "color perception problems[,] flashes of light, halos, bands of light[,] moving patterns[,] after-images[,] reading problems [,] anxiety, fear, panic [,] mood instability [,] difficulty focusing and concentrating [, and] poor problem-solving and decision-making[.] Additionally, prolonged or heavy use of hallucinogenic mushrooms can cause...cravings, failure to stop or control use, continuing use despite problems caused by use [of these mushrooms], using [the mushrooms] in risky situations like driving, and developing a tolerance for higher doses." Some of that is embodied in how Jinshi reacts in this fic.

I would love to write more Apothecary Diaries fics in the future if I have the chance.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!